

# LIVABLE MECK

BETTER...TOGETHER.

# 2020 Reflections from 2020

PROGRESS REPORT

CHARLOTTE | CORNELIUS | DAVIDSON | HUNTERSVILLE | MATTHEWS | MINT HILL | PINEVILLE

# The Year 2020

Throughout all the years of strife and triumph in Mecklenburg County's history, 2020 has been a year distinct in its challenges. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has influenced how residents live, learn, work and connect. COVID-19 has introduced barriers to basic needs and social norms. It has strained our local economy, educational systems and health care providers. Despite the multifaceted and dynamic problems of 2020, Livable Meck Partners continuously rose to the occasion. The 2020 Livable Meck Progress Report features stories of hope and resiliency. Livable Meck Partners are steadfast in their commitment to quality of life – for everyone.

We hope the 2020 Livable Meck Progress Report will provide readers a moment of peace and optimism for the future.

## LIVABLE MECK

Livable Meck is an engagement infrastructure, bringing organizations together to enhance the quality of life across our community. Livable Meck's purpose is to coordinate, support and enact positive change by:

- Engaging residents and stakeholders in a process to guide community growth;
- Facilitating collaboration among the community's private, nonprofit and government organizations;
- Measuring the livability of Mecklenburg County's communities; and
- Communicating stories and progress to inspire.

## PARTNERS

Livable Meck Partner Organizations agree to support the community plan and protect the quality of life in our community. Partners are encouraged to share their talents, wisdom and energy with each other in collaborative efforts and within their own business models. Partners actively engage with Livable Meck by attending events, sharing experiences and inviting others to become partners.

Visit [LivableMeck.com](http://LivableMeck.com) to learn more and get involved.

## EVOLUTION

In 2012, the City of Charlotte, Foundation For The Carolinas and Mecklenburg County assembled to consider growth projections and quality of life concerns. This effort was called the *Mecklenburg Livable Communities Plan*. At that time, one million more residents were anticipated in the Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) by 2050. Since then, that expectation has accelerated, and we now anticipate one million more residents by 2030.

The goal of Livable Meck is to leverage resources and talents to meet the demands of this growth and protect the quality of life for Mecklenburg County residents.

In 2019, the "Voice of the Community" engagement experience revisited the original plan and made modifications based on feedback from more than 4,200 community voices. Those voices demand our community be: **HEALTHY, AFFORDABLE, SECURE, ACCESSIBLE, EDUCATED, INNOVATIVE, ENJOYABLE, and TOGETHER**.

These principles and their associated strategies serve as a collective road map to ensure our community's strengths dominate the story of our remarkable growth and sustain us into the future.

## OUR TIMELINE

2012	2013	2014	2015	2017	2018	2019	2020
Effort launched; community stakeholders engaged	Feasibility study completed	Community vision and guiding principles adopted	Think tank meetings; Livable Meck is rebranded and partner initiatives inventory updated	New business model implemented; steering committee expanded	"Voice of the Community" partner-based research experience began	"Voice of the Community" concludes and new plan published	Operations adjusted given COVID-19 health restrictions and the changing needs of partners.

## PROGRESS REPORT

This report highlights good news from throughout our community by including partner collaborations and success stories that exemplify the plan's **eight guiding principles**.

### OUR COMMUNITY WILL BE...

**Healthy**  
PAGE 06

**Affordable**  
PAGE 08

**Secure**  
PAGE 10

**Accessible**  
PAGE 12

**Educated**  
PAGE 14

**Innovative**  
PAGE 16

**Enjoyable**  
PAGE 18

**Together**  
PAGE 22

	<b>HEALTHY</b>	<b>AFFORDABLE</b>	<b>SECURE</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<b>EDUCATED</b>	<b>INNOVATIVE</b>	<b>ENJOYABLE</b>	<b>TOGETHER</b>
DESCRIPTION								DESCRIPTION
AREA of FOCUS								AREA of FOCUS
<b>STRATEGIES</b>	<p>Build a healthier community by promoting physical and mental wellbeing and a healthy environment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION</li> <li>• NUTRITION</li> <li>• WELLNESS</li> </ul>	<p>Encourage options that promote affordability and proximity to work and leisure.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AGING-IN-PLACE</li> <li>• CHILDCARE</li> <li>• HEALTHCARE</li> <li>• HOUSING</li> <li>• JOBS</li> </ul>	<p>Strive to enhance safety and create a more prepared community that can easily recover from natural disasters, significant events or emergencies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ECONOMIC RESILIENCE</li> <li>• EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS</li> <li>• INFRASTRUCTURE</li> <li>• PUBLIC SAFETY</li> </ul>	<p>Facilitate and enhance equitable access to public amenities, services and information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION</li> <li>• ROADS/PATHWAYS</li> <li>• INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY</li> </ul>	<p>Strengthen educational resources, programs and systems to unleash individual potential, close achievement gaps and enhance talent readiness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SKILLED WORKFORCE</li> <li>• ARTS &amp; CULTURE</li> </ul>	<p>Leverage diversity of thought, ideas, talents, abilities and resources to create a thriving community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CREATIVITY</li> <li>• TECHNOLOGY</li> <li>• ENTREPRENEURSHIP</li> </ul>	<p>Enhance the community through experiences.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ENTERTAINMENT</li> <li>• DESTINATIONS</li> <li>• FESTIVALS &amp; EVENTS</li> <li>• SPORTS &amp; LEISURE</li> </ul>	<p>Build lasting connections and relationships that characterize a welcoming, connected and valued community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HOSPITALITY</li> <li>• DIVERSITY</li> <li>• SOCIAL CAPITAL</li> </ul>
<b>STRATEGIES</b>	<p>Increase access to and information about healthy lifestyle choices, healthcare and mental health services.</p> <p>Increase access to healthy foods.</p> <p>Protect and expand green space and recreational amenities.</p> <p>Protect and restore the natural environment.</p>	<p>Encourage affordable options for healthcare and disease prevention.</p> <p>Expand the availability of affordable recreation and cultural programs.</p> <p>Encourage affordable housing options (including purchasing or rentals).</p>	<p>Prepare for natural disasters, economic shifts or significant events.</p> <p>Plan for the future and population growth.</p> <p>Address the conditions that give rise to public safety concerns.</p> <p>Strengthen relationships between residents and public safety service providers.</p>	<p>Improve public transportation services to improve physical and economic mobility across and within the community.</p> <p>Be accessible to all generations and abilities.</p> <p>Support ease of navigating the community – walking, biking and driving.</p> <p>Increase access to Wi-Fi and technology.</p> <p>Improve understanding of public services and how to effectively access them.</p>	<p>Foster a culture of life long learning.</p> <p>Increase access to arts, science and history education.</p> <p>Expand and enhance learning across all age groups.</p> <p>Develop community leaders for the future.</p>	<p>Support new technology solutions.</p> <p>Make it easier for new businesses to succeed and existing businesses to flourish.</p> <p>Manage the regulatory environment to revitalize community character and preserve the natural environment while allowing for growth and innovation.</p>	<p>Expand options (indoor and outdoor) to participate in the arts, recreational activities, sports, parks and cultural events.</p> <p>Welcome and promote culturally diverse culinary arts.</p> <p>Encourage opportunities for residents to be entertained.</p> <p>Encourage destination recreation opportunities.</p>	<p>Welcome new people, ideas and opportunities.</p> <p>Bring people together via information and events.</p> <p>Create an environment safe for diversity of thought and creative conflict.</p> <p>Celebrate and integrate history, culture and diversity.</p>

The first four guiding principles: **HEALTHY**, **AFFORDABLE**, **SECURE** and **ACCESSIBLE** describe the **environment desired**.

The next three principles: **EDUCATED**, **INNOVATIVE** and **ENJOYABLE** describe **what we'll do in our environment**. The final principle: **TOGETHER** describes **how we want to be with each other**.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLE

# Healthy

Build a healthier community by promoting physical and mental wellbeing and a healthy environment.

### AREA of FOCUS:

- ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
- NUTRITION
- WELLNESS



The UNC Charlotte Graduate Assistant Senior Program provides health and wellness to senior citizens

## STRATEGIES



Increase access to and information about healthy life-style choices, healthcare and mental health services.



Increase access to healthy foods.



Protect and expand green space and recreational amenities.



Protect and restore the natural environment.

## Promoting physical and mental well-being and a healthy environment for seniors

The Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department is dedicated to enhancing our community through wellness, recreation, open space and natural resources. In partnership with The University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNC Charlotte), the UNC Charlotte Graduate Assistant Senior Program was established to realize this mission.

The partnership takes a two-pronged approach to providing health and wellness to senior citizens of Mecklenburg County.

First, it offers Health Risk Assessment Screenings by graduate assistants from the Department of Kinesiology. Screenings occur at seven locations and include:

- medical history and lifestyle questionnaire to identify modifiable lifestyle factors affecting health risk
- vital signs (heart rate, resting blood pressure, respiration, body temperature, arterial oxygen saturation) review to screen for risk for hypertension, heart disease or other potential conditions

Importantly, the health assessments are free for county residents. This allows seniors one-on-one time with graduate assistants to evaluate the seniors' overall health and wellness and create a plan and routine to support overall healthy living.

Second, the partnership curates physical activity programming at the same locations for safe, supervised exercise. As a fun way to further engage participants of each location, the graduate assistants created a Senior Walking Challenge which awarded each location points if seniors walked a quarter of a mile each day. At the end of the program, the winning center walked a combined 1,937 miles. This was not only a boost of health and wellness but an innovative and enjoyable way to bring people together and improve their quality of life.

Graduate assistants have worked with more than 23,000 senior residents and have been able to make an indelible impact on the seniors' lives. For example, one individual shared with our staff that prior to attending she did not have the strength to leave her house and walk on her own. She now is a regular participant and attends a walking club weekly.

This program addresses not only the healthy and affordable Livable Meck principles but also has a focus on education as the UNC Charlotte staff help create specific plans for each active adult. To sustain this important work, adjustments to the program were made in 2020 due to COVID-19, and will continue through the end of FY21.



### How has this program helped you?

When I first came here, I couldn't walk 4 laps around the gym. Then after a while, I can now walk 20 laps. I just started walking one day and kept walking. Then when I went to the hospital and came back I couldn't ride the bike for 1 minute. Now I can do it for 10 minutes. Then I started riding 25-30 minutes. I feel it helped and that's why I'm still coming. I have seen myself improve over the time I've been here.

— Darlene M.

### What do you think about the classes?

I love the classes. They keep my bones from being stiff, especially my hands. They get numb sometimes. The more I do, the better I improve.

— Dianne B.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

# Affordable

Encourage options that promote affordability and proximity to work and leisure.

AREA of FOCUS:

- AGING-IN-PLACE
- CHILDCARE
- HEALTHCARE
- HOUSING
- JOBS



Lórien student gets started on a racial reconciliation art project.

STRATEGIES



Encourage affordable options for healthcare and disease prevention.



Expand the availability of affordable recreation and cultural programs.



Encourage affordable housing options (including purchasing or rentals).

## Expanding available art programs for youth in low-income households

Access to art is an often overlooked disparity between youth growing up in affluence and youth growing up in low-income households, and Lórien Academy of the Arts exists to bridge this gap.

Research shows that engagement in high quality art education and experiences is foundational to the holistic development of children. The brain's right hemisphere, for example, is dedicated to creative thinking, innovation, imagination and the abstract, and is developed most effectively through engagement with art. When developed, it works in symphony with the left hemisphere for thinking, reasoning and problem solving. If it is not developed, it becomes dead weight, forcing the brain to work twice as hard with half the effectiveness.

Lórien Academy's flagship program is an 8-week Summer Art Academy in which students enroll in various art courses with an overarching curriculum that is based on a college model. In summer 2020, COVID-19 required a pivot to a distance-learning model. Every week, new art assignments were delivered to students and completed projects picked up in person.

This face-to-face contact provided invaluable insight into the home lives of students. When Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) made the decision to move to full-time remote learning, the Lórien Academy got firsthand knowledge of the myriad challenges facing low-income students. In addition to feeling restless and frustrated in quarantine with a lack of creative and social outlets, many faced the added challenge of learning and studying in a home that is crowded, noisy and often lacking in effective heating, ventilation and air conditioning.

In response, Lórien Academy launched an after-school in person program, Open Studio. By the end of the first week, several students who had signed up for one or two days per week asked, emphatically, if they could come in person every day. For one particular student, COVID-19 forced extended family members to converge into one house, leaving them in a living situation where 11 people shared a three-bedroom, 1,200-square-foot house. Lórien Academy's Open Studio is the only outlet she has in which to study, socialize, rest and decompress through creating art.

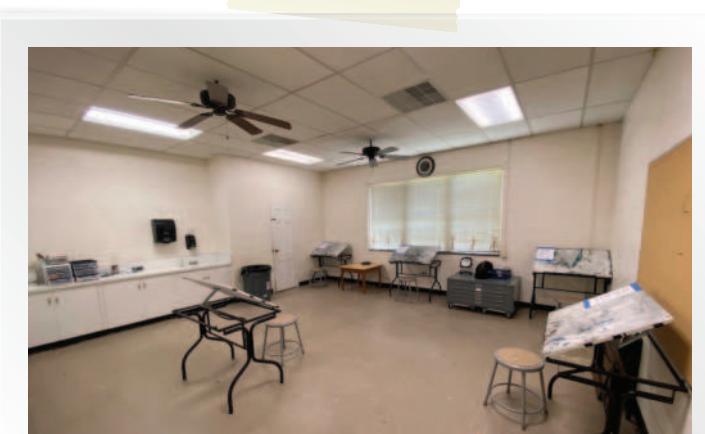
Amidst these uncertain times, Lórien Academy believes the need is greatest now for its student population and was compelled to expand programming. Simply offering these students a safe space to create, to see friends and to have a few hours of relative quiet to study will go a long way in helping maintain their mental, social and emotional health during a time of unprecedented isolation.

For more information, visit <https://lorienacademy.org>



The reasons that I enjoy coming to the Lórien Academy Arts Open Studio is for the simple fact that it's a place where creativity, comfort, and innovation is welcomed and encouraged.

— G



COVID can't crush creativity. Art desks sanitized, socially distant, & ready for art students.

# Secure

Strive to enhance safety and create a more prepared community that can easily recover from natural disasters, significant events or emergencies.

**AREA of FOCUS:**

- ECONOMIC RESILIENCE
- EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS
- INFRASTRUCTURE
- PUBLIC SAFETY



IKEA gave Atrium Health frontline medical workers 1,000 cinnamon buns on National Cinnamon Bun Day

## IKEA Charlotte and partners collaborating to help hundreds in Mecklenburg County

When the pandemic hit, IKEA Charlotte, a model Livable Meck Partner, leapt into action, reaching out to organizations across the region that were helping people fight COVID-19 and the serious challenges it imposed. Starting in April and throughout the summer months of 2020, IKEA Charlotte partnered with the Urban Ministry Center, Atrium Health, MEDIC (Mecklenburg EMS), Beds for Kids and other local organizations.

IKEA Charlotte's donation to the Urban Ministry Center provided enough home furnishings for people to move out of shelters and into ten scattered-site apartments.

"When we help move someone from a shelter or off the street into their own apartment, we really try to make it feel like home," said Stephen J. McQueen, Chief Program Housing Officer for Urban Ministry Center and the Men's Shelter. "This IKEA donation does just that. When our clients walk into their new homes and see that everything is provided, from flatware to kitchenware to linens to bathmats, they are overwhelmed."

IKEA Charlotte also donated sheets, towels, blankets, pillows and other essential household items to Atrium Health to help the health care system assist the region's most vulnerable residents who were battling COVID-19 and other difficult situations.

**STRATEGIES**

- Prepare for natural disasters, economic shifts or significant events.
- Plan for the future and population growth.
- Address the conditions that give rise to public safety concerns.
- Strengthen relationships between residents and public safety service providers.

"We are grateful to IKEA for these generous donations to help serve the community through Atrium Health's Care Management Program," said Naomi West, AVP of Community Care at Atrium Health. "We often see how social determinants of health, such as homelessness, lack of access to resources and food insecurity can contribute to a person's overall health. By working side by side with community partners, we can help care for, manage and coordinate services to our most vulnerable."

IKEA Charlotte also gave Atrium Health 1,000 cinnamon buns on National Cinnamon Bun Day (Sunday, October 4) as a token of appreciation to frontline medical workers.

"We have seen a tremendous outpouring of love and support for our teammates and Atrium Health patients and are deeply grateful for the continued partnership with IKEA," said Lois Ingland, VP of Community Engagement & Corporate Responsibility at Atrium Health.

Beds for Kids was another recipient of IKEA Charlotte's generosity, receiving sofas, coffee tables and dining tables to provide to children and their families in need.

"In this unique season, Beds for Kids has been fortunate to continue to serve families in our community, with the help of our community," said Kevin Warren, Partnerships and Volunteer Manager for Beds for Kids. "IKEA is a great example of a company that is tangibly making an impact on the lives of children and their families in our area."

IKEA Charlotte also helped MEDIC furnish a breakroom, which MEDIC praised in a Facebook post with, "Our crews will enjoy this space to relax and recharge during these difficult times."


*IKEA Charlotte co-workers*

Thank you for the wonderful furniture you have donated to Beds for Kids! We have been honored to serve our client families through the COVID pandemic as we provide beds and essential furniture to children and their families in need. You are Difference Makers in our community!

All Our Best!  
Kevin & The Beds for Kids Team



Beds for Kids

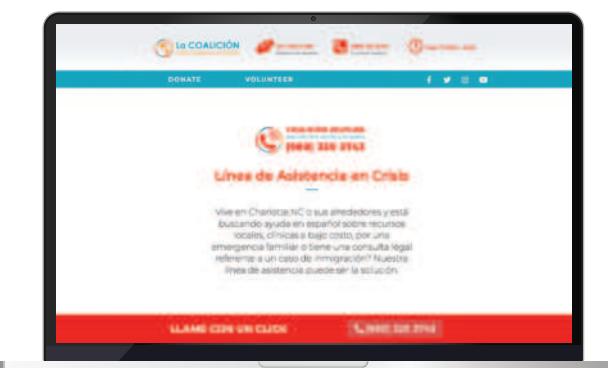
## GUIDING PRINCIPLE

# Accessible

Facilitate and enhance equitable access to public amenities, services and information.

### AREA of FOCUS:

- PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION
- ROADS/PATHWAYS
- INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY



## Latin American Coalition and partners connecting Latino community with resources to address COVID-19 challenges

In March 2020, in the very early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the U.S. when many had no idea how detrimental it would prove to be, the Latin American Coalition (LAC) acted swiftly and preemptively to ensure access to social services to the Latino community. Supported with emergency funds granted by United Way of the Central Carolinas and Foundation For The Carolinas, the LAC banded together with its partners to create virtual access to its social services, called the LAC Helpline.

The LAC provides Latino and immigrant communities in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area access to information and support surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic in real time. Between March 30 and July 10, 2020, the Helpline received 2,170 calls.

"Our community is looking for local information and resources in their language," said José Hernández-París, Executive Director of the LAC. "Many of the official communications are not in Spanish, it is difficult to find updated information, and families do not know where to look for help."

### STRATEGIES

- Improve public transportation services to improve physical and economic mobility across and within the community.
- Connect neighborhoods via infrastructure and events. Be accessible to all generations and abilities.
- Support ease of navigating the community – walking, biking and driving. Increase access to Wi-Fi and technology.
- Improve understanding of public services and how to effectively access them.

Soon after the launch of the Helpline, LAC began publishing Facebook Live webinars about preventative health in partnership with Atrium Health. Both Atrium and Novant Health donated masks to distribute at the LAC's office for the Latino community.

In addition to offering access to information surrounding COVID-19, LAC continues to provide direct services to improve the economic mobility for Latinos in the area. LAC's Economic Mobility Center (EMC) hosts job-specific training and workshops to increase Latinos' access to dignified work. Computer classes, small business development classes and labor rights workshops arm Latinos with tools to ultimately build and increase generational wealth. Financial support from the Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services makes it possible for the EMC to have a full-time employee dedicated to this work.

The Center also holds individual consultations to help clients build resumes and search for employment. In 2019, the EMC served 1,732 individuals.

LAC is launching a bus to reach families with limited access to transportation or limited mobility. The "Busecito" will take a LAC case worker directly to neighborhoods where families can receive LAC social services without worrying about transportation to the LAC office. These services include food pantry applications, assistance with rent, guidance in finding low-cost clinics and translation of official documents.

For more information, visit <https://latinamericancoalition.org>

LAC, in partnership with various organizations, is creating economic mobility and access to life-changing services for all in the community.



*City of Immigrants Virtual Run supporting the LAC Helpline*

# Educated

Strengthen educational resources, programs and systems to unleash individual potential, close achievement gaps and enhance talent readiness.

## AREA of FOCUS:

- SKILLED WORKFORCE
- ARTS & CULTURE



The Engagement Café panelists

## STRATEGIES

- Foster a culture of life long learning.
- Increase access to arts, science and history education.
- Expand and enhance learning across all age groups.
- Develop community leaders for the future.

## Engaging the community to increase economic and educational opportunities

The Livable Meck Engagement Café is a valuable instrument in addressing quality of life issues. On September 30, 2020, Livable Meck Partners from government entities, private businesses and nonprofits came together virtually to highlight the economic and educational importance of skilled trades careers. The issue of skilled trades falls under the Livable Meck Guiding Principles of an AFFORDABLE and EDUCATED community in which there are multiple pathways for financial stability and educational opportunities.

According to *USA Today*, there will be an estimated three million job vacancies in the skilled trades by 2028. Those vacancies represent a critical issue of our local community's prosperity. Skilled trades careers include solar panel installers, electricians, plumbers, HVAC technicians, carpenters and welders. Trades are in demand and will be even more so in the future given our community's growth and the retirement of current trades professionals.

Professionals in skilled trades are essential workers. In fact, the COVID-19 health crisis has demonstrated the significance of skilled trades. Tradesmen and women are keeping our economy going – they keep lights on, water flowing and buildings safe.

In a March Executive Order, Governor Roy Cooper highlighted skilled trades as essential, "to the infrastructure of the State and nation, and to the day-to-day life of North Carolinians." (March 27, 2020)

As we move forward, trades will continue to provide employment opportunities to help sustain families and fuel the local economy. Leaders and economists are carefully monitoring the unstable unemployment figures related to retail, hospitality and restaurants. In contrast, the skilled trades are an area of hope and have returned to high levels of employment.

The Engagement Café provided an opportunity for local leaders to share their insight and experience with the community and, most importantly, encourage others to get involved in expanding economic and educational opportunities. Our Partners at Lowe's were instrumental in assembling local experts and advocates. Lowe's Generation T program's efforts to rebuild and revitalize the skilled trades was the inspiration for the café. County Manager Dena R. Diorio kicked-off the event with remarks emphasizing that trades are essential for recovery and growth. Panelists included Marvin Kelley with Goodwill Industries of the Southern Piedmont, Melinda Bales with the Huntersville Town Board of Commissioners, Darren Ash with The ROC (Rebuilding Opportunities in Construction) Charlotte, and LaToya Faustin with She Built This City Charlotte.

The inaugural live streamed Engagement Café had strong results including number of viewers, duration of time spent watching, and new followers to the Livable Meck Facebook page. Livable Meck Partners have made commitments to increasing the awareness of the trades professions, volunteering with existing programs (for both adults and youth), and potentially hosting their own programs dedicated to skilled trades careers. Livable Meck will work with Partners to help them fulfill their commitments and report results in 2021.



# Innovative

Leverage diversity of thought, ideas, talents, abilities and resources to create a thriving community.

## AREA of FOCUS:

- CREATIVITY
- TECHNOLOGY
- ENTREPRENEURSHIP



## Developing creative solutions to help businesses flourish

Like so many communities across the country, COVID-19 upended the way businesses and community matters were handled for the Town of Davidson. In response, the Town quickly initiated collaborative communication among the County, the Town, businesses and the Davidson community to gather meaningful input on priorities for its support in order for businesses to re-open safely.

The Town and the business community communicated regularly through Zoom calls and emails, and the Town was able to respond in the following ways:

- Disseminated critical information from Mecklenburg County and the State of North Carolina regarding business policies and public health information.
- Informed the community about what businesses were open and the safety precautions being taken to ensure the health of the community.
- Provided signage, social distancing sidewalk markers, reserved parking spaces for curbside pick-up, face masks, outdoor tables and chairs, outdoor umbrellas, hand sanitizer stations, benches and additional trash cans to help facilitate the new way in which the community was shopping and dining.

## STRATEGIES



Support new technology solutions.



Make it easier for new businesses to succeed and existing businesses to flourish.



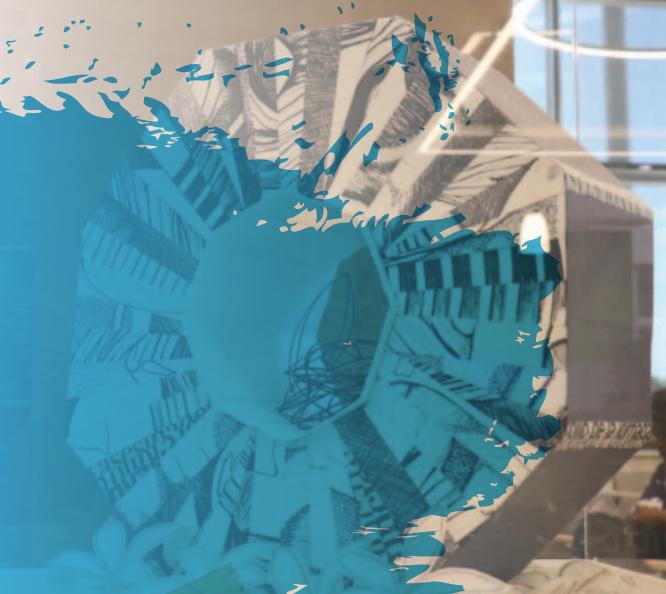
Manage the regulatory environment to revitalize community character and preserve the natural environment while allowing for growth and innovation.



Signage for reserved parking spaces provided for the Davidson Community



Outdoor tables and chairs provided for the Davidson Community



GUIDING PRINCIPLE

# Enjoyable

Enhance the community through experiences.

AREA of FOCUS:

- ENTERTAINMENT
- DESTINATIONS
- FESTIVALS & EVENTS
- SPORTS & LEISURE



STRATEGIES



Expand options (indoor and outdoor) to participate in the arts, recreational activities, sports, parks and cultural events.



Welcome and promote culturally diverse culinary arts.



Encourage opportunities for residents to be entertained.



Encourage destination recreation opportunities.

## Enhancing the community through collaboration

Long-time residents of East Charlotte remember a day when, decades ago, the 6.7-acre property on Windsor Park's Somerdale Lane was home to a community pool and tennis courts – a place for families and communities to gather, connect with neighbors and friends, and enjoy the outdoors. After the recreational facilities shuttered in the mid-90s, the abandoned property fell into neglect and dilapidation. Overgrown grass and deteriorating structures were a liability for residents and visitors while serving as a visual reminder of the decades of public and private sector divestment experienced by the surrounding geographies.

In 2018, Carolina Farm Trust (CFT) partnered with Aldersgate Retirement Community, the current owner of the site, to plan an urban farm for the 6.7-acre property. Following two years of fundraising and planning, the Urban Farm at Aldersgate broke ground in early 2020 and produced its first harvest in June 2020, including multiple varieties of peppers, tomatoes, eggplant and okra. A partnership with Providence Day School has brought an apiary to the site which will soon yield a locally-harvested honey. Trees Charlotte has provided hundreds of fruit trees and berry bushes to the Farm to support an on-site orchard that will produce a variety of fruits, including blueberries, figs and peaches.

The primary function of the Urban Farm at Aldersgate is to improve access to nutritious, affordable and sustainably-grown foods in Windsor Park and East Charlotte, particularly for community members who might otherwise face difficulties in accessing such foods. Yet the Urban Farm at Aldersgate is so much more. The Farm is a community asset that can be enjoyed and used by the community to improve quality of life and strengthen connections between neighbors.

Future plans for the Farm include placemaking features, such as a bonfire pit, public art and walking trails, all of which will improve the Farm's potential as a local outdoor destination. CFT's vision for the Urban Farm at Aldersgate is that it will someday be a destination for visitors to Charlotte – a place where they can experience the patchwork of East Charlotte's diverse, intergenerational and multicultural communities coming together around local food, sustainability, creativity, culture and the outdoors.

In October 2020, the Urban Farm at Aldersgate hosted its first community gathering, welcoming neighborhood musicians, local artists, East Charlotte leadership groups, local chefs, affordable housing advocates and community members. The Farm has immense potential to be a place that the community relies upon for participation in the arts, recreation and cultural events, and CFT is eager to continue to welcome new visitors to this special place.

For more information, visit <https://carolinafarmtrust.org>



Dear Alex & Zack,

*It was a thrill to be part of this first fall social at the Urban Farm at Aldersgate. Total pleasure working with both of you and we couldn't be happier with this partnership. Looking forward to many more social events.*

*Thank You,  
J. Michael Haithcock*



*Inaugural community event at Urban Farm at Aldersgate*

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

# Enjoyable

Enhance the community through experiences.

AREA of FOCUS:

- ENTERTAINMENT
- DESTINATIONS
- FESTIVALS & EVENTS
- SPORTS & LEISURE



Rendering of the new Quest at Latta Nature Preserve

STRATEGIES



Expand options (indoor and outdoor) to participate in the arts, recreational activities, sports, parks and cultural events.



Welcome and promote culturally diverse culinary arts.



Encourage opportunities for residents to be entertained.



Encourage destination recreation opportunities.

## Encouraging destination recreation opportunities

The Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department is thrilled to announce two new facilities have just completed construction and will be ready to fully serve the residents of Mecklenburg County when community gathering restrictions are lifted.

### QUEST

At Latta Nature Center and Preserve, Mecklenburg County has created a joint campus with the Carolina Raptor Center known as Quest, located at 6345 Sample Road in Huntersville. The 13,000-square-foot facility will provide a new gateway experience to the 1,400-acre Latta Nature Preserve and was designed to deliver the environmental and outdoor recreation programming that residents have come to love from Park and Recreation staff. Additionally, the Carolina Raptor Center will relocate its gift shop and the new 23-acre Raptor Trail to Quest.

Three indoor classrooms will host thousands of school children annually, as well as summer camps. Indoor and outdoor exhibits will focus on the importance of Mountain Island Lake, the nature preserve's natural resources, clean water, and the inspiration that birds and wildlife bring to our lives.

A 6,600-gallon freshwater aquarium, a reservable indoor meeting room, a catering kitchen, food truck pads and an expanded Raptor Center gift shop are added amenities for visitors and special event hosting.

### STEVENS CREEK

Concurrently, the Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department has established the Stevens Creek Nature Preserve and Nature Center, located at 15700 Thompson Road in Mint Hill. This location features an 11,000-square-foot nature center located on a 280-acre nature preserve that protects part of the watershed along Stevens Creek, which is a critical habitat for the federally endangered Carolina Heelsplitter freshwater mussel. There are about three miles of walking and hiking trails on the preserve. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Storm Water Services also recently completed a stream restoration project on Stevens Creek that can be seen from a steel pedestrian bridge connecting the nature center campus with the rest of the preserve.

The center includes an Augmented Reality Sandbox, a hands-on sandbox combined with 3D visualization applications to teach visitors about topography and water flow. There will also be a "living" stream exhibit with water flowing through tanks with fish, turtles and other species found in Stevens Creek. Amenities at Stevens Creek include outdoor classroom spaces, a reservable meeting room, youth classrooms, offices, a technology and education center, and a warming kitchen and outdoor fire pit. Weekly educational and environmental programming, as well as summer camps, will be offered at the nature center.

For more information, visit <https://thisisquest.org> and <https://www.mecknc.gov/ParkandRec>.



Stevens Creek



Stevens Creek Aerial

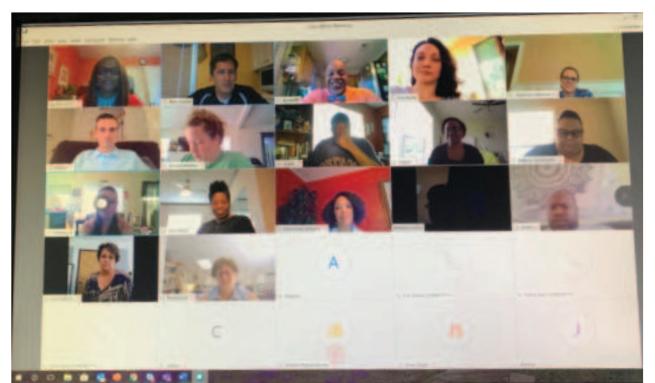
GUIDING PRINCIPLE

# Together

Build lasting connections and relationships that characterize a welcoming, connected and valued community.

AREA of FOCUS:

- HOSPITALITY
- DIVERSITY
- SOCIAL CAPITAL



Virtual court

STRATEGIES

- Welcome new people, ideas and opportunities.
- Bring people together via information and events.
- Create an environment safe for diversity of thought and creative conflict.
- Celebrate and integrate history, culture and diversity.

MECKLENBURG COUNTY  
NORTH CAROLINA  
*I SEE RISING, DIMLY, ON THE HORIZON,  
THE DAWN OF A NEW DAY THAT MUST  
COME, IF THE GREATNESS THAT IS  
AMERICA IS TO SURVIVE.*  
— Fred Alexander Sr., 1968

## Offering a new chance to thrive

Mecklenburg County's Supervision, Treatment, Education and Prevention (S.T.E.P.) Program operates six Recovery Courts (RC). Part of Mecklenburg County's Criminal Justice Services Department, the RC represents the coordinated efforts, effective interactions and use of resources between criminal and juvenile justice personnel, child protective services personnel and community agencies in assisting individuals to overcome addiction and to rebuild their lives.

The RC mission is to holistically inspire and empower individuals on the pathway to recovery and mental wellness by bridging the gap between the family, community resources and legal entities, and by advocating for and reducing the stigma of recovery in the criminal justice system and the local community.

The RC participants are determined to recover and credit the intensive services and support provided by their judges, assistant district attorneys, public defenders, case managers, probation officers, treatment counselors and peer supporters in creating an opportunity for them to thrive.

Facing addiction and medical challenges and a failed attempt at RC, another participant re-enrolled. Assistance in addressing his substance use disorder, combined with the support and accountability provided by the RC team, provided the missing element for him to move forward in

his recovery and realize his path to a productive and successful future. He has returned to UNC Charlotte to complete his bachelor's degree and is grateful for the support provided by RC and its intensive case management.

Another participant, Jeremy, enrolled in RC in February 2020, and although COVID-19 threw what he called "a serious wrench" in his routine, he was determined not to enter prison. The new RC virtual services – case management, court sessions, care team meetings, treatment and recovery supports – launched in March 2020 provided him with the ability to become self-sufficient by regaining employment, re-evaluating a career in physiology and applying for graduate school. He not only regained his footing but maintains perfect attendance in treatment while working full time and attending online community support meetings. He encourages others by being a positive influence in the recovery community.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic created new opportunities for collaboration among the RC teams and participants. RC has been able to assist participants in accessing technology (cell phones and tablets) for virtual services, dealing with transportation needs, accessing safe and stable housing, receiving employment skills training, and securing jobs.

These collaborative efforts have helped to create stability in an unstable world, allowed parents to continue having visits with their child(ren), re-established positive relationships with family, sustained recovery and led to graduation from RC. The hope and support experienced in RC is motivating and inspiring to both participants and the RC team.

For more information, visit <https://www.mecknc.gov/CriminalJusticeServices>

Being a part of this program was a life saver for me – I didn't think I could have handled 2020 without this team.  
— Z

The cell phone I was given was a lifeline. Before, I couldn't really keep in touch but the phone let me Facetime my son and check-in with my counselor.  
— M

This program has helped me get my life back on track. With the resources they have suggested I use, I have a support system that will continue to help me once I am done with the program. Without it, I would still be lost.  
— Anonymous

# Quality of Life



While the Livable Meck plan uses guiding principles and strategies to lead our community into the future, it also leverages data to identify and measure quality of life issues, relevant trends and outcomes. Livable Meck uses a variety of data sources, but the primary source of information is the [Quality of Life Explorer](#).

The Quality of Life Explorer was created in partnership with the City of Charlotte, Mecklenburg County and the UNC Charlotte Urban Institute, with the towns of Cornelius, Davidson, Huntersville, Matthews, Mint Hill and Pineville.

Given the impacts of COVID-19 on public health, the economy and other quality of life indicators, Livable Meck expanded data being considered for the 2020 Progress Report. Information from a North Carolina and national lens is included to appreciate a broader context of factors impacting Mecklenburg residents. The specific sources include the 2020 Mecklenburg County Community Survey, Feeding America and the U.S. Census Pulse Survey. These sources illustrate how residents are impacted and opportunities for Livable Meck Partners to act. Livable Meck will use this information to help meet residents' most immediate needs (i.e. health, affordability, education, etc.).

Moving forward, Livable Meck will layer these sources with the Quality of Life Explorer to determine the best approach to serving Partners and the overall community. Partners are encouraged to use these sources to consider their own priorities and operations for the future.



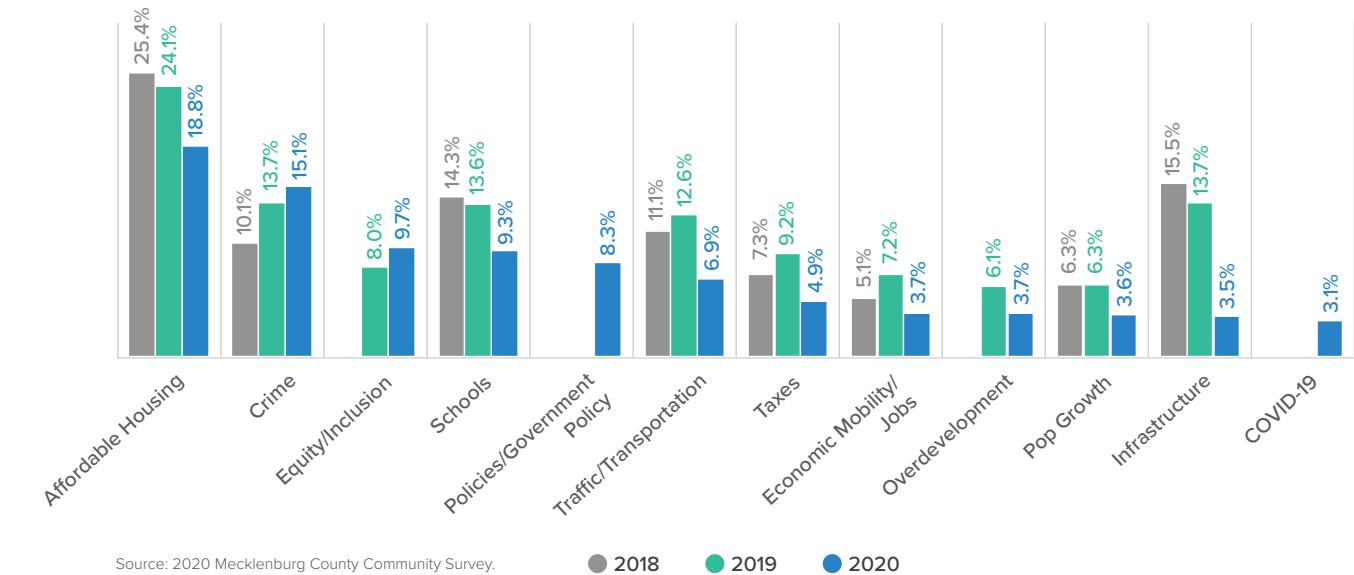
Mecklenburg County greenway



Harvey Gantt receives one of the first COVID-19 vaccinations available to the public in January 2021.

## MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE

In your opinion, what is the MOST IMPORTANT issue facing Mecklenburg County today?



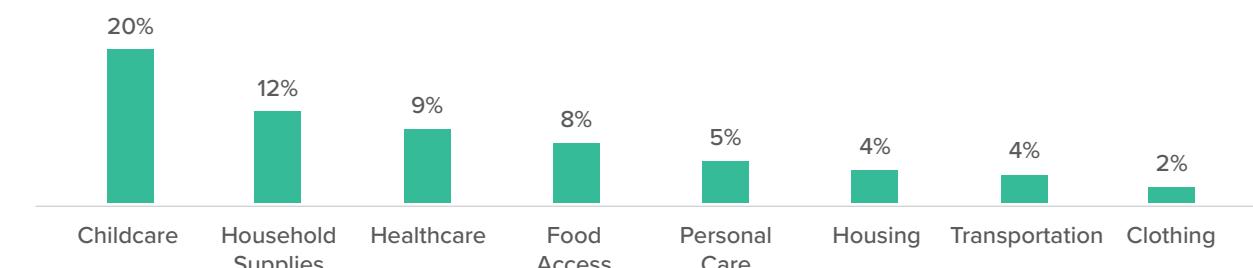
Source: 2020 Mecklenburg County Community Survey.

● 2018 ● 2019 ● 2020

## ACCESS TO GOODS AND SERVICES

When asked, "To what degree have you and your immediate household been impacted by access to the following due to the COVID-19 outbreak?" residents indicated that accessing childcare was the largest disruption to daily life.

### Percent of Respondents who Indicated "Significant Daily" or "Severe Disruption"

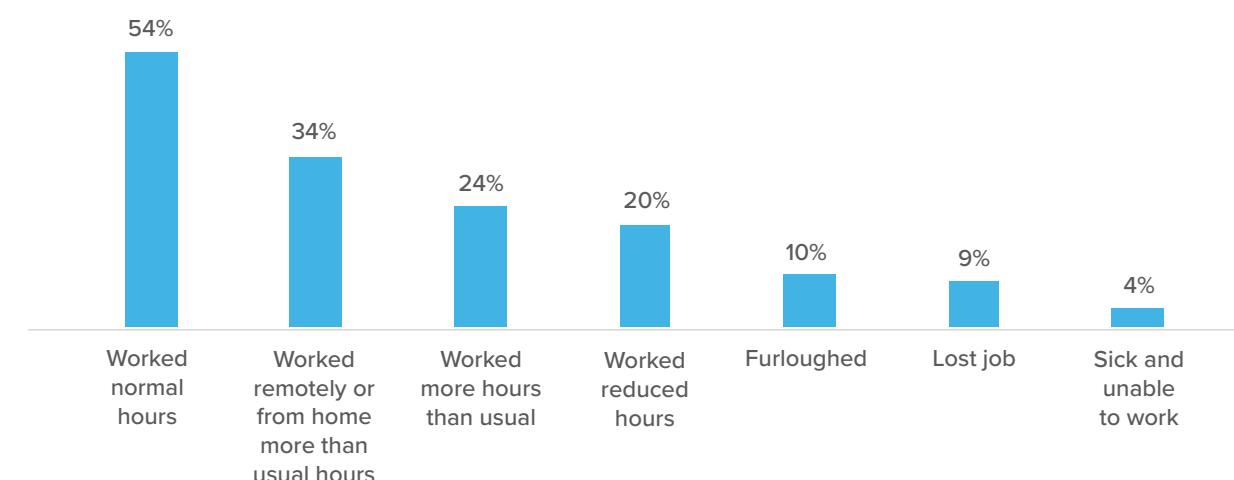


Source: 2020 Mecklenburg County COVID-19 Community Survey, Version 1 (Meck County)

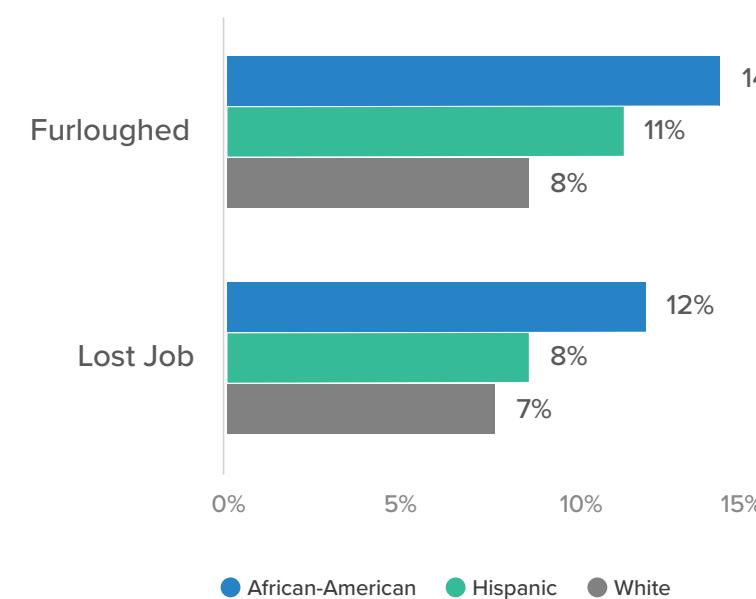
## FINANCIAL IMPACT

Mecklenburg County is estimated to have the sixth lowest food insecurity rate for North Carolina counties although that still represents a substantial increase from levels in 2018 and follows a pattern seen statewide of rising insecurity and disparities in access to food.

**Percent of respondents who indicated the following work status applied to them**



## Work Status Impact by Race

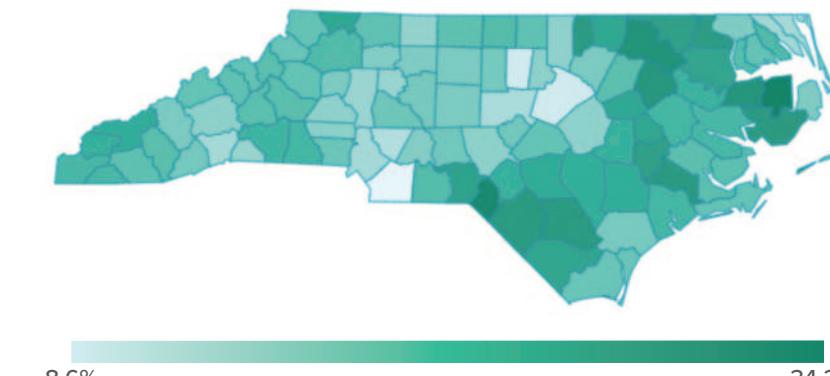


Source: 2020 Mecklenburg County COVID-19 Community Survey, Version 1 (Meck County)

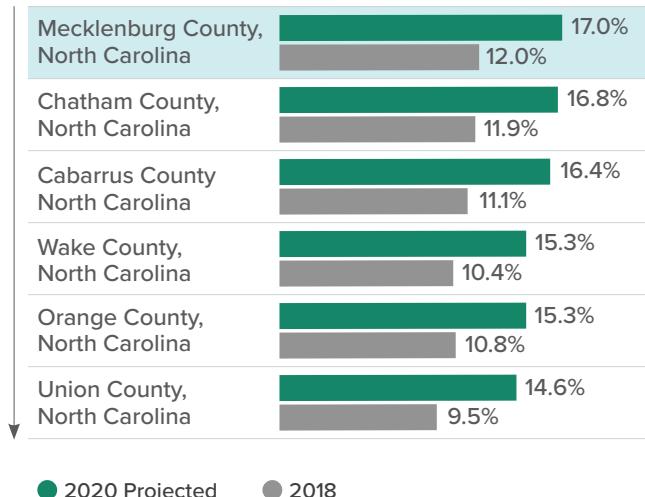
## FOOD INSECURITY

Despite disparities in access to food, Mecklenburg County is estimated to have the sixth lowest food insecurity rate for North Carolina counties. That still represents a substantial increase from levels in 2018 and follows a pattern seen across the state of rising insecurity.

### 2020 projected overall food insecurity rate



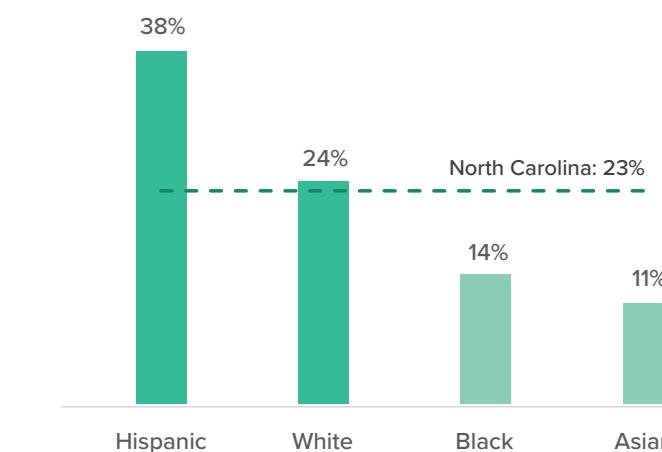
### NC counties with the lowest food insecurity rate



Source: Feeding America, <https://www.feedingamerica.org/research/coronavirus-hunger-research>; Note Food insecurity is USDA's measure. Methodology is here, <https://www.feedingamerica.org/research/map-the-meal-gap/how-we-got-the-map-data>

## MENTAL HEALTH

### Percent of adults in North Carolina households that have experienced symptoms of depression in the last 7 days



According to the US Census Pulse Survey, mental health issues show a different racial and ethnic distribution, with Hispanics and Whites above the state average.

At the time of this reporting the latest state data release available was from week 12 (July 16 – 21). The weekly Census survey started April 23, 2020.

CHARLOTTE | CORNELIUS | DAVIDSON | HUNTERSVILLE | MATTHEWS | MINT HILL | PINEVILLE

